



**NORTH CAROLINA CENTER FOR  
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**TOP LOBBYISTS SAY PERSONAL CONTACT IS BEST FOR INFLUENCING LEGISLATORS**

In an age of email, telephone banks, and television advertising to promote legislation, personal contact with lawmakers still is the most effective way to wield influence, says the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research in a new study released today. These findings, published in the latest edition of *North Carolina Insight* magazine, come from a survey of the state's 48 top lobbyists, asking them to identify the tactics, technologies, and techniques that make them effective.

"This study shows two important lessons," says Sam Watts, the Center's policy analyst and author of the study. "The first is that personal contact still works best when trying to influence legislation. The second is that the same tactics that work for the state's most influential lobbyists will work for the average citizen."

**The Most Effective Tactics Used by Professional Lobbyists**

For 11 consecutive legislative sessions, the Center has surveyed legislators, lobbyists, and capital news reporters to identify the most influential lobbyists. In a new twist, the Center added a follow-up survey of the most influential lobbyists to determine what makes them so effective. Forty-two of the 48 lobbyists (88 percent) named as the most influential in last year's survey responded, providing insights for citizens on how to be effective advocates in trying to pass, kill, or modify legislation in the N.C. General Assembly.

To find which tactics the state's most influential lobbyists think are most effective, the Center asked them to rate various lobbying tactics. Of the 12 lobbying tactics listed in the Center's survey, the three rated most effective are: (1) meeting personally with legislators, (2) using a coalition approach where different groups coordinate their lobbying, and (3) establishing a statewide grassroots network that can be activated to contact legislators.

Next most effective is (4) using a team approach in lobbying, where one or more members of a team lobby Democrats and one or more members lobby Republicans. Ranking lower on the list are tactics such as using telephone banks to help constituents contact legislators and buying television, radio, or print advertising to influence legislation.

**Effective Tactics for Citizens To Use in Contacting Legislators**

Professional lobbyists say that the same methods that work for them in influencing legislators are also the right tools for citizens to use if they have concerns about an issue. Asked to rank five ways for *citizens* to lobby legislators effectively, the state's most influential lobbyists again say personal contact with legislators is the most effective method. Next in effectiveness is telephone contact, followed by a personal letter, a fax, and

finally, email. "Personal contact is effective," says Harry Kaplan, a contract lobbyist representing nine clients, including the N.C. Association of Health Plans, Cascade Auto Glass, and the North Carolina affiliate of the American Heart Association. He adds, "I've seen legislation based on a single conversation between one constituent and a legislator." Kaplan believes that legislators enjoy personal contact from citizens and that personal contact with legislators on issues is not as common as people generally assume.

Kaplan also recommends that citizens invite legislators to visit or tour their local facility or program, thereby setting the stage for grassroots "in-person" contact during and after the visit. "Legislators like it because they want to be known in their district, and it makes your facility real to them," says Kaplan.

### **Factors That Make an Individual Lobbyist Effective**

The Center also asked the most influential lobbyists to rank factors that make an individual lobbyist effective. The lobbyists say "the ability to communicate accurate information on the legislation in question" is most important. Second most important is a group's ability to generate grassroots support for an issue, such as by having constituents in most of North Carolina's 100 counties who can contact their legislators. A group's political or economic clout ranks third, and the ability to make or direct campaign contributions ranks least important of the four factors rated.

Nevertheless, a previous Center study discovered the growing number of lobbyists who have clients with political action committees that can make campaign contributions. Of the 48 most influential lobbyists, the Center says 35 (73 percent) represent at least one company or interest group with a PAC.

### **The Growing Use of Technology by Lobbyists**

Technology clearly is playing a larger role in lobbying practices. For example, all of the influential lobbyists surveyed say they regularly use **email** in their lobbying practices, and all say they use an **online or email daily news summary**.

Paula Wolf, who lobbies for the nonprofit Covenant with North Carolina's Children, sometimes emails verbatim accounts of committee debates to child advocate groups and interested citizens. "I'm well-known as the Empress of Email," says Wolf. "It's the most efficient way for me to communicate with people." In addition, all but one respondent say they use a **cellular or mobile telephone** in their lobbying practice, and half use a **laptop or portable computer**.

Younger lobbyists are more likely to use technology such as **wireless email devices** and **personal display adapters (PDAs)**. "I've got more than 2,000 phone numbers programmed into my PDA phone," says Bill Brooks, who lobbies for the N.C. Family Policy Council. "When I need a constituent in a legislator's district, I can usually find one."

"There is a time and place for every one of the new tools in the lobbyist's toolbox," says Roger Bone, a contract lobbyist who ranks as the state's third most influential lobbyist. "The art of lobbying today is knowing which tool to use, when to use it, and when not to over-use it. If you encourage fourteen dozen constituents to call a lawmaker on a non-controversial issue, you're wasting the legislator's time, but if you were to have those same constituents call the same lawmaker an hour before a meeting where he is the swing vote on your legislation, you might accomplish something."

### **Changes in the Lobbying Profession Over the Last 10 Years**

The most influential lobbyists also identified major changes in their environment over the last 10 years. These include heightened party competition in legislative elections and the resulting near-parity between



Democrats and Republicans in the legislature, the increased availability and use of information technology, the growing diversity in the lobbying corps, and the increase in the sheer number of lobbyists.

As one lobbyist who completed the Center's survey but who wished to remain anonymous wrote, "Lobbyists must now deal with legislators from both political parties and with the various factions within each party, while in the past, North Carolina was a one-party state, and the members of the minority party were frequently ignored. There also is much more reliance on...caucus meetings to try to iron out issues in private." Each political party in the legislature meets regularly in a caucus to discuss the party's position on issues such as a state lottery or budget and tax positions. Another lobbyist responding to the survey says, "With a closer balance between Democrats and Republicans, it becomes increasingly difficult to pass controversial legislation. Defense becomes easier the closer we get to parity."

The Center also notes the growth in the number of lobbyists. The number of *lobbyists* registered at the end of each long session has grown by 18 percent since the 1993 session, according to data compiled by the Center. Similarly, the number of lobbying *clients* registered at the end of the 2001 session was 20 percent higher than in 1993.

### **Predictions on the Future of Lobbying in the Legislature**

As for the future, North Carolina's most influential lobbyists predict increased demands that lobbyists participate in political campaign fundraising, increased diversity in the lobbying corps, and increased use of information technology in the legislative process.

Political analysts believe campaign costs are likely to continue to rise as long as the state's political parties remain near parity in their ability to elect candidates. "In business, competition drives costs down. In political campaigns, competition drives costs up," says John N. Davis, who tracks campaigns for a pro-business research group called NCFREE.

The North Carolina General Assembly itself has seen a slow but steady increase in the number of women and minority legislators. Many lobbyists believe this trend also will show up in the lobbying corps as interest groups hire people who can more easily relate to a diverse legislature. "As diversity increases in the legislature, that will be reflected in the lobbying corps," says Mike Carpenter of the N.C. Homebuilders Association. Paula Wolf says, "There are more women lobbyists. Women can wear pants now." However, the Legislative Black Caucus has raised questions about the low number of African American lobbyists representing corporations.

Finally, one influential lobbyist forecasts "more and more technology. Presently, my time in the Appropriations and Finance [Committees] has been reduced by using audio on the General Assembly's website [<http://www.ncleg.net>]. I predict other committee meetings will be on audio soon."

The N.C. Center for Public Policy Research is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit corporation that studies key public policy issues facing North Carolina and evaluates state government programs. The Center receives funding from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation in Winston-Salem, 11 other foundations, 160 corporate contributors, and almost 800 individual and organizational members across the state. In addition to publishing *North Carolina Insight* magazine, the Center also publishes a citizens' guide to the legislature and book-length research reports. The Center recently has published studies on ways to improve voter turnout and accuracy in counting votes, the pros and cons of state lotteries, and North Carolina's experience with charter schools. The Center currently is conducting studies on the governance of public universities and on family violence in North Carolina.

Copies of the issue of *North Carolina Insight* containing the Center's research on what makes an effective lobbyist are available for \$20, which includes tax, postage, and handling. To order, write the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research at P.O. Box 430, Raleigh, NC 27602, call (919) 832-2839, fax (919) 832-2847, or order through the Center's web site at <http://www.nccppr.org>

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For more information on the Center's study of what makes an effective lobbyist, call Sam Watts, policy analyst, or Ran Coble, executive director, at the N.C. Center for Public Policy Research at (919) 832-2839.

**Table 4. Ranking of Effectiveness of Alternative Methods for Citizens To Use When Contacting Legislators**

Please rank the effectiveness of these methods for *citizens* to use in contacting their legislators from 1 to 5, where 1 is the most effective and 5 is the least effective. Please use each number (1-5) only once.

| Method    | Rank of Effectiveness | Average Effectiveness (Mean) | Number of Respondents (n) out of 48 Most Influential Lobbyists |
|-----------|-----------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| In person | 1                     | 1.10                         | 42                                                             |
| Telephone | 2                     | 2.31                         | 42                                                             |
| U.S. mail | 3                     | 3.21                         | 42                                                             |
| Fax       | 4                     | 4.07                         | 41                                                             |
| Email     | 5                     | 4.29                         | 41                                                             |

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**Table 5. Ranking of Factors in Determining a Lobbyist's Effectiveness**

Please rank the importance of these four factors in determining a *lobbyist's* effectiveness from 1 to 4, where 1 is most important and 4 is the least important. Please use each number (1-4) only once.

|                                                                                               | Rank of Effectiveness | Average Ranking of Item (Mean) | Number of Respondents (n) out of 48 Most Influential Lobbyists |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| The ability to communicate accurate information on the legislation in question.               | 1                     | 1.90                           | 41                                                             |
| A client which has constituents in almost all 100 counties who can contact their legislators. | 2                     | 2.20                           | 40                                                             |
| Political or economic clout of client(s).                                                     | 3                     | 2.44                           | 41                                                             |
| The ability to make or direct campaign contributions.                                         | 4                     | 3.22                           | 41                                                             |

**Table 7. Evaluation of Lobbying Techniques Used by  
48 Most Influential Lobbyists**

Please indicate whether you, your clients, or your employer(s) have used any of the following techniques as a part of a lobbying effort involving the N.C. General Assembly. Then, please rate the persuasiveness of the techniques on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is not effective at all and 10 is extremely effective. Please give your opinion on the effectiveness of each technique, even if you have not personally used it.

|                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>%<br/>Have<br/>Used</b> | <b>%<br/>Have<br/>Not Used</b> | <b>Rank of<br/>Effectiveness</b> | <b>Average<br/>Effectiveness<br/>(Mean)</b> | <b>Number of 48<br/>Responding to<br/>to Whether<br/>They've Used<br/>Technique</b> | <b>Number of 48<br/>Responding to<br/>Whether<br/>Technique<br/>Is Effective</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Personally meeting with legislators in their offices or in an informal setting, such as over a meal.                                                                                   | 100.0                      | 0.0                            | 1                                | 8.83                                        | 42                                                                                  | 42                                                                               |
| Using a coalition approach to lobbying, where multiple organizations join forces on an issue and coordinate action.                                                                    | 100.0                      | 0.0                            | 2                                | 8.60                                        | 41                                                                                  | 42                                                                               |
| Establishing a statewide grassroots network to contact legislators when prompted.                                                                                                      | 90.2                       | 9.8                            | 3                                | 8.15                                        | 41                                                                                  | 39                                                                               |
| Using a team approach to lobbying, where one (or more) member(s) of a team of lobbyists lobbies Democrats, and other(s) Republicans.                                                   | 63.4                       | 36.6                           | 4                                | 6.97                                        | 41                                                                                  | 33                                                                               |
| Using a team approach to lobbying, where one (or more) member(s) of a team of lobbyists lobbies the House, and other(s) the Senate.                                                    | 63.4                       | 36.6                           | 5                                | 6.88                                        | 41                                                                                  | 32                                                                               |
| Using a team approach to lobbying, where one (or more) member(s) of a team of lobbyists lobbies a specific caucus or demographic group, such as women or African American legislators. | 53.7                       | 46.3                           | 6                                | 6.59                                        | 41                                                                                  | 29                                                                               |
| Hiring a public relations firm or a political campaign consultant to coordinate legislative strategy or message.                                                                       | 61.0                       | 39.0                           | 7                                | 6.15                                        | 41                                                                                  | 33                                                                               |
| Providing a legislator with a copy of an op-ed (opinion editorial) from a newspaper or magazine by a respected community or state leader.                                              | 87.8                       | 12.2                           | 8                                | 5.63                                        | 41                                                                                  | 40                                                                               |
| Buying TV, radio, or print advertising to promote your cause.                                                                                                                          | 42.9                       | 57.1                           | 9                                | 5.47                                        | 42                                                                                  | 32                                                                               |
| Using a professional telephone bank with live operators to automatically connect constituents with a legislator by telephone.                                                          | 33.3                       | 66.7                           | 10                               | 5.21                                        | 42                                                                                  | 28                                                                               |
| Using an automated telephone bank to connect constituents with a legislator by telephone.                                                                                              | 21.4                       | 78.6                           | 11                               | 4.32                                        | 42                                                                                  | 22                                                                               |
| Using an automated telephone bank to encourage a legislators' constituents to contact the legislator by telephone.                                                                     | 17.5                       | 82.5                           | 12                               | 4.10                                        | 40                                                                                  | 20                                                                               |



**Table 8. Selected Verbatim Responses on  
Changes in Lobbying Over the Last 10 Years**

- Changes every four years in Speaker/leadership; closer numbers, especially in the House, where one cannot simply lobby the leadership.
- Lobbyists must now deal with legislators from both parties and with the various factions within each party, while in the past, North Carolina was a one-party state, and the members of the minority party were frequently ignored. There is much more reliance on "The Caucus" and many more "caucus issues" and caucus meetings to try to iron out issues in private.
- Legislators [are] being influenced by polls and consultants and worrying too much about re-election. Prior to 1990s, there were members who were guided more about doing what was good for N.C. despite the criticism they might get.
- Technology has had the most influence via e-mail and the Internet; the increased sophistication by using such techniques as patch-calling from constituents to members.
- The amount of money required for campaigns and the resulting expectation [of campaign contributions] to the candidate/legislator.
- There are more women lobbyists. There are two political parties. Women can wear pants now.

**Table 9. What To Expect in the Future:  
Verbatim Responses from Lobbyists**

- Continued advances in electronic communication and related devices; increased number of lobbyists as more and more groups and entities seek to influence the political process; greater availability of services specialized to aid in lobbying and grassroots contact.
- Lobbying will require more PAC money and personal money if you are to have influence; more sophisticated lobbying teams with allied grassroots efforts.
- More and more technology. Presently, my time in Appropriations and Finance [Committees] have been reduced by using audio on General Assembly website. Predict [other] committee meetings will be on audio soon.
- More PAC money.
- Unless there are changes of some kind in the future, I regret that the influence of fundraising will become more and more dominant in dealing with the legislative process. Demographic changes in North Carolina will also influence the legislative process. "Team Lobbying" in order to take advantage of political, ethnic and other distinctions will grow as a practice. The length of the sessions will probably continue to grow, unless session limits are enacted, which will increase the use of full-time lobbyists rather than part-time lobbyists or lobbyists who include lobbying as a mere portion of their other professional practices.
- With a closer balance between Democrats and Republicans, it becomes increasingly difficult to pass controversial legislation. Defense becomes easier the closer we get to parity.
- More use of technology, more emphasis on campaign contributions, unless and until we have meaningful campaign finance reform.